



The Wine Advocate - Issue #207

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In the top tier of producers in Washington State, wild man Charles Smith fashions singular, exotic wines that never lack for richness or texture. While his wines can push the limits in some vintages and be slightly controversial, there's nothing controversial or over the top with these 2010s and 2011s and they have beautiful purity of fruit, clean, integrated acid profiles and solid underlying structure. In almost all cases, given the quality, they represent incredible values. While this was a slight marathon tasting, when the wines are this good, it's always easy to keep your motivation. Focusing on low-yields in the vineyards, the winemaking here is straight-forward with almost all of the wines seeing some whole cluster fermentation, time on lees and aging primarily in neutral French oak.
– Jeb Dunnuck

2010 KVintners Syrah Royal City (\$100) 99 Points

One of the top Syrahs out there, the 2010 Syrah Charles Smith Royal City is a 100% Syrah from the Stoneridge Vineyard, which was first planted in 2001, and consists of big stones and broken limestone soils. Borderline perfection (and I seriously considered rating it a point higher), it oozes incredible aromas and flavors of smoked herbs, olive, underbrush, game and copious black fruits. This is followed by a full-bodied, decadent, yet beautifully precise wine that doesn't come anywhere close to being over the top. A wine that makes my heart rate increase, this awesome Syrah is worth the effort to track down! It should hit full stride around age five or six and have 15-20 years of total longevity. Don't miss it! Drink 2015-2030.

2010 KVintners Syrah The Hidden Northridge Vineyard (\$70) 98 Points

Moving back to the estate's top Syrahs, the 2010 Syrah The Hidden Northridge Vineyard comes from the warmer, Wahluke slope AVA and was fermented with 50% whole cluster prior to aging in 100% new 500-Liter French oak puncheons. An incredible wine, it possesses off the hook aromas and flavors of meaty black fruits, cedar box, exotic spice and smoked herbs as well as a decadent, massively fruited, structured and full-bodied palate. Deep, rich and layered on the mid-palate and showing awesome length on the finish, this absolutely fabulous Syrah will be even better in another 2-3 years and have 15+ years of ultimate longevity. Drink 2016-2025.

2010 KVintners Syrah Phil Lane (\$70) 95+ Points

There was a single barrel of the 2010 Syrah Phil Lane, so it's very unlikely many readers will get a chance to taste this wine. Nevertheless, it's certainly worth the extra effort (or visit to the winery) to track down. Coming from a small, very rocky plot located just outside the winery (or what use to be the winery and is now a residence and tasting room), it delivers beautiful black fruits, damp earth, ground pepper, hung game, smoke and toasted spice qualities along with a tight, reserved, yet brilliantly focused and pure profile on the palate. Full-bodied, structured and age-worthy, it needs 3-4 years of bottle age and will thrill for a decade after that. Drink 2016-2026.

2010 KVintners Syrah The Beautiful (\$62) 95 Points

A co-fermented blend (as are all of Charles' wines as he doesn't believe in keeping varieties separate during aging) of 97% Syrah and 3% Viognier, the 2010 Syrah The Beautiful got a big "Wow!" in my notes. Floral, perfumed and elegant, with copious raspberry, white pepper and spice nuances, it flows onto the palate with a seamless, ethereal texture, silky tannin and no hard edges. Already approachable and a total thrill to drink, it should continue to impress for over a decade. Drink now-2023.

2010 KVintners Malbec Stoneridge Vineyard Broncho (\$70) 95 Points

The 2010 Malbec Bronco Stoneridge Vineyard is 100% Malbec and was aged in 40% new French oak. A great example of this variety, with deep, layered aromas and flavors of smoked meats, ash, tobacco, cedar cabinet and assorted black fruits, it delivers a classy mix of fruit, tannin and acidity on the palate. Leaning towards the decadent and hedonistic end of the spectrum, this pleasure-bent effort should be consumed over the coming 8-10 years. Drink now-2020.

2010 KVintners The Creator (\$58-65) 94+ Points

Moving away from 100% Syrahs, the 2010 The Creator checks in as a blend of 70% Cabernet Sauvignon and 30% Syrah. It's a seriously perfumed and rich effort that boasts knockout aromas of cassis, mint, wild herbs and cedar along with a full-bodied, pure, precise and brilliantly textured palate. In need of 2-3 years in the cellar, it should see its 15th birthday in fine form. Drink 2016-2025.

2010 KVintners Syrah Morrison Lane (\$44-53) 94 Points

The 2010 Syrah Morrison Lane (100% Syrah) comes from some of the oldest Syrah vines in Walla Walla. Aged in 30% new French oak, it's a beauty with notions of black raspberry, kirsch, pepper, big minerality and hints of leather all soaring from the glass. This is followed by a classy, yet structured Syrah that has high quality tannin and rock star length on the finish. As with all of Charles' wines, it can be enjoyed in its youth due to the texture and overall balance, yet it won't hit its stride until a handful of years after the vintage. It should age gracefully for 10-12 years, easily. Drink now-2025.

2010 KVintners Syrah Old Stones (\$60) 94 Points

A new wine and a one off, as the fruit from this vineyard is no longer available, the 2010 Syrah Old Stones comes from a particularly rocky section of The Rocks in the southern part of the Walla Walla Valley. Downright exotic, with plenty of wild herbs, meat juice, olive tapenade and crushed stone aromas and flavors, this beauty hits the palate with full-bodied richness, big structure and a broad chewy finish that has serious length. If you don't like a little meat and funk in your Syrah, this isn't for you. Drink it over the coming decade. Drink now-2023.

2011 KVintners Viognier Charles Smith (\$40) 94 Points

Also brilliant and one of the top Viogniers made in Washington State, the 2011 Viognier Charles Smith comes from the Lawrence Vineyard, which is located just north of the Royal Slope, at an elevation of 1,450 feet. Barrel-fermented in 10% new French oak and going through full malolactic, it's a knockout effort that will give a top flight Condrieu a run for its money (actually, if price is factored in, this most likely wins hands down). Beautifully aromatic with brioche, apricot, toast and white peach all emerging from the glass, it hits the palate with a medium to full-bodied, decadently textured mouthfeel that never seems heavy or cumbersome, yet delivers awesome richness and depth. Enjoy this knockout white over the coming handful of years. Drink now-2016.

2011 KVintners Syrah The Hidden Northridge Vineyard (94-97) Points

A step up and one incredible barrel sample, the 2011 Syrah The Hidden Northridge Vineyard comes from very old, broken limestone and basalt soils of the Wahluke Slope. Offering up incredible purity of fruit, brilliant mid-palate density and full-bodied power, this awesome looking 2011 will be up with the creme de la creme of the vintage. While it has serious levels of richness and fruit, it also hangs onto a sense of freshness and elegance, and has more than enough underlying structure to evolve gracefully for 15+ years. Drink 2016-2026.

2011 KVintners Syrah Upland Vineyard (94-97) Points

Coming from the steep, gravel soils of Upland Vineyard and a 100% Syrah, the 2011 Syrah Upland Vineyard is up there with The Hidden Syrah in terms of quality. Giving up deep, dense aromas and flavors of liquid blackberry, crushed rock, underbrush and roasted meats, it hits the palate with a full-bodied, concentrated and muscular feel that certainly doesn't lack for richness or depth. Broad, chewy and structured, it will require bottle age to fully fleshy out; it should evolve for 15+ years or more easily. Drink 2016-2026.

2011 KVintners Merlot Northridge Vineyard (93-95) Points

Last but not least, and looking just as good as the 2010, the 2011 Merlot Northridge Vineyard presents an inky purple color to go with a knockout nose of creme de cassis, crushed stone-like minerality, violets and graphite. Full-bodied, supple and concentrated, with integrated acidity, sweet fruit and building tannin, it should be reasonably approachable on release and deliver the goods for upwards of a decade. Drink 2014-2021.

2011 KVintners Syrah Riverrock Vineyard (93-95) Points

Looking at the 2011s from barrel, all of which are impressive, the 2011 Syrah Riverrock Vineyard is 100% Syrah that's aging in puncheons and on gross lees (this is slightly heavier, larger pieces of skin, pulp etc.). Showing the cooler nature of the vintage, with lively blackberry, smoke, lavender and crushed stone, it doesn't lack for richness or depth and has full-bodied power, great acidity and a long, classy finish. I imagine it will benefit from short-term cellaring once released and have a lengthy drink window. Drink 2016-2023.

2011 KVintners Syrah The Deal Sundance Vineyard (93-95) Points

Also from the Wahluke Slope and showing the same bramble and spice undertones found in the 2010, as well as a core of sweet kirsch and plum fruit, the 2011 Syrah The Deal Sundance Vineyard flows onto the palate with a decadent, voluptuously styled texture, solid mid-palate depth and enough tannin to evolve for over a decade. It should wind up being a mid to low 90s scoring wine and represent a superb value. Drink 2015-2023.

2010 KVintners Merlot Stoneridge Vineyard (\$45) 93 Points

First produced in 2009, the 2010 Merlot Stoneridge Vineyard would be a perfect introduction into the Bordeaux blends of this estate. Spending 26 months in 50% new French oak, it offers up a ripe, rich array of plum sauce, black olive, kirsch, cedar and gravel to go with a soft, supple and beautifully fruited palate. Medium-bodied, with an approachable feel, it nevertheless has a great mid-palate and at least a decade of longevity. Drink now-2020.

2010 KVintners M C K Syrah (\$35) 93 Points

Starting off the 2010s, which were all tasted out of bottle, the 2010 Syrah Motor City Kitty is 100% Syrah that's from the Northridge and Stoneridge Vineyards. Up-front, loaded with fruit and downright sexy in its texture and suppleness, it delivers ripe aromas and flavors of mulled black fruits, Asian spices, licorice, asphalt and hints of game along with a full-bodied, open-knit palate that has no hard edges and a drink me now feel. Hedonistic, yet beautifully balanced and pure, it will deliver the goods over the coming 5-6 years. Drink now-2018.

2010 KVintners Syrah Cougar Hills (\$40-54) 93 Points

From deep, loamy soils and a north facing slope located to the west of The Rocks region of the Walla Walla Valley, the 2010 Syrah Cougar Hills is an age worthy effort that boasts complex aromas and flavors of kirsch liqueur, crushed stone, ground pepper and dried flowers. This is followed by a medium to full-bodied, broad, chewy effort that maintains an overall sense of elegance and freshness. Drink it over the coming 10-12 years. Drink now-2025.

2010 KVintners Sangiovese Guido (\$45) 93 Points

A 100% Sangiovese that was first produced in 2003 from a plot of vines planted in 1996, the 2010 Sangiovese Guido is a firm, age worthy red that has cedar-laced aromas of dry-aged beef, toasted spice, dried herbs and saddle leather giving way to full-bodied, balanced palate. Showing solid concentration and plenty of tannin on the finish, it needs 3-4 years in the cellar. Drink 2016-2025.

2010 K Vintners Syrah The Deal Sundance Vineyard (\$30-60) 93 Points

Also from mostly sandy soils, the 2010 Syrah The Deal Sundance Vineyard is a medium-bodied, elegant and supple Syrah that offers gorgeously perfumed and complex aromas of spice, raspberry, bramble and hints of rendered bacon fat on the nose. Building in richness and with awesome persistence on the finish, it is hard to resist now; nevertheless, it should evolve gracefully and have upwards of a decade of ultimate longevity. Drink now-2020.

2010 K Vintners Syrah Pheasant Vineyard (\$37) 93 Points

A superb vintage for this cuvee, the 2010 Syrah Pheasant Vineyard is 100% Syrah that comes from sandy loam soils and vines planted in 2000. Aged in 30% new French oak, it offers up peppery, Christmas spice-like aromas that give way to more game, rosemary and smoked fruit qualities with air. This full-bodied, gorgeously textured Syrah has no hard edge, excellent concentration and a light, elegant mouthfeel that carries through the lengthy finish. An absolute superb value, this beauty will evolve for 2-4 years and drink well for 10-12 years. Drink now-2022.

2011 K Vintners Syrah Clifton Vineyard (92-94) Points

A wine that wasn't produced in 2010, the 2011 Syrah Clifton Vineyard is a 100% Syrah all from the Wahluke Slope AVA. Loaded with potential, it exhibits a dense, full-bodied profile to go with already complex aromas and flavors. Showing the freshness of the vintage with its juicy, integrated acidity, it has beautiful ripeness, no hard edges and superb overall balance. It should be reasonably approachable on release and age gracefully. Drink 2015-2026.

2011 K Vintners The Creator (91-94) Points

A blend of roughly 70/30 Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah, the 2011 The Creator offers up classic cassis, currants, graphite, lead pencil and hints of chocolate as well as a medium to full-bodied, straight and focused feel on the palate. Opening up in the glass, with a core of sweet fruit and finely polished tannin, it has lively acidity and an overall fresh, pure feel. It should evolve gracefully for 12-15 years. Drink 2016-2026.

2010 K Vintners Syrah Milbrandt Vineyard (\$26-37) 91 Points

The 2010 Syrah Milbrandt Vineyard was fermented with 50% whole cluster and aged for 12 months in around 25% new French oak. Coming from the Northridge and Sundance Vineyards, it offers a pretty, perfumed bouquet of black cherry, raspberry, underbrush, flowers and hints of pepper to go with a medium to full-bodied, Up-front and elegant palate. Lively, delicious and easy drinking, it should be enjoyed over the coming 5-7 years. Drink now-2018.

2012 K Vintners Riesling Kung Fu Girl (\$12) 90 Points

Kicking off the whites and talking about value, the 2012 Riesling Kung Fu Girl has to be one of the best values in white wine coming out of Washington State; when you see the total production numbers, it's straight up unbelievable to have a wine of this quality, price and availability. Offering up a gorgeously pure, fresh bouquet of lychee nut, mint, citrus and clean minerality, this beautifully focused Riesling flows onto the palate with a balanced, full mid-palate, only a touch of sweetness and integrated, yet lip smacking acidity that shines on the finish. There's real Riesling character here (and after tasting loads of Washington State Riesling, trust me, this is not a given) and this beauty should be purchased by the case. Enjoy bottles over the coming year. Drink now-2014.